

Eerie silence is interrupted by the sudden electric pop of flickering, fluorescent lights before they settle into a low hum. Their cold, blue-white glow taunts my eyelids, forcing my hand to retreat over my face in defence. Before I'm even granted the chance to open my watering eyes the sour taste of metal and mildew hits the back of my throat, earning my displeasure of a spluttering cough.

I pull myself up from bed when a surge of pain surrounds my wrists. I glance down to the gruesome sight of raw infected skin, ridged and wet to the touch thanks to the murky substance that seeps from it. With no recollection of who inflicted these wounds upon me, I inhale deeply as if I could pull up the memory from my lungs, only to be disappointed by fragments of memory that taunt me like fireflies before vanishing into the night.

Shaking off my defeat, I begin to take in my unfamiliar surroundings. The room is small and suffocating, its atmosphere thick with a sense of abandonment and despair. The walls, once painted a dull white, have faded to a sickly yellow-grey, streaked with dark stains that drip down like dried tears. Beneath layers of chipped paint, the cracked plaster bulges ominously, as if the room itself is holding its breath, waiting to exhale.

Occasionally, one of the lights sputters and dies, plunging the room into a momentary darkness before snapping back to life with an electric pop.

The single bed I occupy sits against the left wall, its metal frame rusted and warped. The mattress, thin and lumpy, is covered in a threadbare, greyish sheet that smells faintly of bleach but holds a deeper, musty odour beneath. A thick leather strap dangles from one corner, its buckle rusted and worn, telling a silent story of what it once restrained.

I stumble from the lumpy bed, its springs creak and groan in protest, echoing through the stillness. Following the path of natural light to the back of the room, I find myself standing helplessly in front of a barred window, but the only thing offering a connection to the outside world rests too high to see anything other than a patch of the overcast sky.

The glass is filthy and cracked, smeared with a dark substance that could be dust, dirt, or something more sinister. A weak, chilly draft slips through the gaps, carrying with it a faint whisper of the wind.

A sense of panic tickles my chest, how did I get here? My hands tremble slightly as I clutche my head. My fingers dig into my scalp, as if trying to pry open the door to my own mind. I close my eyes tightly, shutting out the low murmurs around me, and sink deeper into the silence. I can feel my heartbeat banging in my temples, a steady, rhythmic thumping that fills my ears like distant drum beats echoing from another time.

The memories are there—I can sense them, lurking like shadows in the fog, just beyond my reach. I strain to see through the haze, to grasp even a single, fleeting image. Fragments of colour and sound flash before my mind's eye: the screams of a helpless girl, blood soaked hands, the scent of freshly dug earth. They dance elusively, like grains of sand slipping through my fingers.

A long buzzing sound rings out from every angle, dragging me from my thoughts before a series of clicks echo throughout the hallway as the doors unlock.. The once soft murmur erupts into a musical of chaos as a crowd of stragglers stumble past my door, all mumbling nonsense to themselves.

Hesitantly, I creep towards my door that now peeks open, and dare to peer around the corner. I gaze toward the direction in which the zombie-like people waddled toward, where a wooden, double door opens its arms into a new room.

I slip toward the clawmark covered doors and enter the new area. The room is a strange blend of order and chaos, where the facade of normalcy barely conceals the underlying turmoil. The room is long and narrow, lined with cold, institutional walls painted a faded, minty green that peels in places, curling like old parchment, revealing the grey concrete beneath. The lights overhead cast a harsh, sterile glow that drains the room of warmth.

Patients shuffle to and fro the cluttered with a mismatched collection of shabby furniture that consists of cracked leather armchairs with stuffing poking through the seams and sagging couches covered in faded floral patterns.

Urged by the violent growling of my stomach, I eagerly approach a shabby table displaying an array of mouth watering foods, accompanied by elderly man with sunken eyes next to it, rocking back and forth in his armchair while his lips move silently as if speaking to invisible companions. The chair creaks with every sway, a rhythmic, unsettling sound that fills the room.

I grasp a fruit scone and shove it in my mouth piggishly, but to my despair, I'm surprised by the cold, stale taste of hard plastic. The man erupts into deranged laughter and splutters through the gaps in his rotting teeth,

'She falls for it every time!'

Across from him, the woman with tangled chuckles unsettlingly as she sits hunched over a small table, her eyes never blinking, locked in a trance-like focus on the worn cards in her calloused hands.

I grit my teeth as I fiddle with the scars on my wrists, anxiety building in my chest like a rising tide induced by the words 'every time'.

I can't remember a single time.

The shadows in my mind twist and writhe, taunting me with their elusiveness. Tears burn at the sides of my eyes and fingernails cut deep into my sweaty palms as I chase ghostly visions through the dark corridors of my mind.

A single, clear image bursts to the surface: a pair of bright green eyes staring back at me, wide with fear. My heart pounds against my ribs as the image lingers for a moment, suspended in time, before a firm hand grabs my wrist.

I stand paralysed as the cold, metal handcuffs scratch against my wounded wrists and the figure behind me states in a firm voice,

‘Patient 465, Dr. Watson is ready for you’.

Broken floorboards creaked as I paced restlessly across the dusty room in a desperate attempt to find any thoughts hiding in the thick fog that is my mind. The air is thick with the stench of mildew and rot, earning a sickening recoil with each inhale.

The walls howled with every gust of wind and the roof sagged, beams exposed like brittle bones threatening to snap. A shattered window, boarded up with rotting planks lets in a harsh, grey light that flickers through tattered curtains, torn and fluttering like forgotten ghosts.

My filthy fingernails pierce calloused skin as I clench my fists tighter, drawing rich, crimson droplets from my flesh. How can they be so stupid? How can they give up so easily when the universe has offered us our solution on a silver platter?

I'm snapped out from my thoughts by the first threatening bang uttered by the nightmares that lurk outside the decaying safe haven. My eyes race to meet the dilated pupils that cower in a dark corner of the room. Our bloodshot eyes lock in a stubborn standoff, ignoring the distressed cries of the inconsolable figures that perform a waltz of terror in my peripheral.

'Our time is up Murphy, this was only a temporary solution,'

I utter sternly, my eyes not leaving the icy pearls that hide behind loose stands of dirty blonde hair. No matter how hard he tries to retain his expression of stone, his body betrays him, forcing a terrified flinch every time a new set of sharp fingernails claws against the loosening boards that protect us from our impending doom.

Regaining his composure, he raises a hushing hand that silences the terrified rustle of helpless women, men and children behind him, until the only sounds that remain are the frantic banging, clawing and groaning that echo through the slowly growing number of gaps in the barricades, inhuman, guttural and desperate.

Despite his trembling hands, muddy and scabby, he responds in a calm tone.

'We have no chance out there, our only hope of survival is to wait and pray as we've been doing.'

The air felt electric, charged with the anticipation of terror, as if the house itself was holding its breath. A cold draft whispered through the broken window, brushing against the skin like the icy fingers of death itself as the remaining few survivors of our once strong, hopeful group await my response.

I grit my teeth before turning away with a chuckle that attempts to hide my fear, breaking eye contact for the first time. Knowing there's no chance of survival in this rapidly falling base, I glance around the room, searching desperately for anything lurking within the thick shroud of yellow mist and dust that might convince at least one of my comrades to come with me.

Every inch of the space felt haunted by abandonment. The wallpaper, once bright, now curled and peeled away like dead skin, revealing the raw, cracked bones of the house beneath. Shelves sagged under the weight of dust and neglect, their contents long scattered, leaving behind only the husks of forgotten lives.

The floor was a patchwork of grime, old stains spreading like dark bruises across the sagging wooden planks. A forgotten chair lay toppled near the centre, its legs splintered, as if it had given up under the weight of time and despair.

Behind the rotting chair, a glimmer of hope catches my attention, the remnants of a quickly dwindling food supply.

In that moment, I knew the groups eyes had landed on the same sight as mine. I didn't need to see their faces, pale, drained of colour, eyes wide and vacant, like candles snuffed out by the wind, to know this.

The birth of a new kind of terrifying tension in the room told me.

The air seemed to freeze in place, thick and suffocating, as the realization hit them like a wave crashing over jagged rocks. Time stretched, each second drawing out painfully slow, as if the universe itself was holding its breath in cruel anticipation before I made one final, dire attempt to save my friends.

'How long?'

Even without turning to face his defeated expression, Murphy knew I was talking to him.

'How long will you wait before you realise there's nothing left for you here? After you run out of food, or after they break through?'

I gesture toward the shattered windows that gaped open where minutes ago rotting planks had concealed, jagged shards of glass clung to the frames, remnants of what once kept the outside world at bay.

Rotten flesh sliced against the glass shards that cling to the window frame as arms reach hungrily through the gaps with no rhyme nor reason. Murkey, brown blood pattered against the floor below, inaudible against the now deafening, violent thumping against the weakening walls.

Terror clung to my skin, thick as sweat. It was tangible, suffocating, crawling up my spine, prickling at the nape of my neck. Adrenaline forced me out of my frozen state and ordered my legs to run toward the rusty, metal ladder that rested, unused behind the lumpy pile concealed beneath a tattered blanket, responsible for the growing stench of rot that clung thick in the air.

I paused for a moment at the foot of the ladder, closed my stinging eyes tight as beads of sweat trickled from my furrowed brow, and willed at least one person to escape the clutches of death alongside me.

With a deep exhale, I opened my eyes and glanced over my shoulder hopefully.

No one.

Everyone remained defeated in the corner, clinging cowardly to each other. Eyes darted to one another, searching for some last sliver of hope, some miracle hidden in the shattered remains of their world—but all they found was shared fear, a silent acknowledgment that this was it. The knot in their stomachs twisted tighter, a cold, gnawing pit that mirrored the despair in their hearts.

There was no fight left in them, no energy to resist the inevitable.

In that moment, the truth was unbearable but undeniable: they were going to die, and the world would go on without them. The weight of that realization was like lead in their chests, pulling them down into a dark, endless abyss of hopelessness.

I took in that final image of my friends, once passionate and strong, reduced to a trembling pile of sitting ducks, and turned back towards the ladder.

One step at a time, I began my steady ascent into the unknown and opened the creaky trapdoor that granted the first, blinding glimpse of daylight I'd seen in months. As I heaved myself into the fresh air, salty tears left began to stain my filthy cheeks.

Without glancing back, I let the trapdoor fall.

With one last bubble, the solution reached its equilibrium. I glanced back at my workings one last time before revelling in my success. Commencing a throaty inhale, the sharp scent of nitric acid penetrated my nostrils, its acrid choke clamping onto the lining of my throat with a burn like peeling back the very skin. I slammed the bung deep into the rim of the flask and prayed I was brisk enough to catch its fleeting breath. Remnants of its inferno prolonged its stay on my tongue but my eventually affliction began to subside.

I pressed my palms onto the chipped workbench to withstand my weight, the striations and upturned chips pricking my calloused skin. With one last peer into the nested flasks mirroring the flooding fluorescence above, I jerked my body towards the door. With a shrill groan, it was flung open revealing Simon pacing the frame like an alert dog.

With a single nod, his arms were propelled around my neck. I stumbled a few paces as I tried to counteract his larger mass, his citrus cologne soothing my lungs.

"After all these years!" His grip constricted like a noose.

I yanked my head away from the embrace to alleviate my goggle's, catching Simon's brief giggle at the cerise groove they implanted into my skin.

"We can finally make a difference." I rose my gaze awaiting his response only to be met with his roguish smirk. His grasp receded before I could utter anything further leaving my nape numb. Click after clack, him and his point shoes trotted over to the adjacent pillar where the corded phone waited, draped like washed linen. The glimmer of the receiver penetrated my vision as he raised it to his ear. Lacing his slim fingers through the dial, their dance mesmerised me.

"Operation Crozen is ready, drop in T -3 days. Standby."

My brow furrowed. I foul taste condensed on my tongue as I felt my mouth go dry along with all the blood in my face. I mustered a few steps forward as the bubble of the solution on the Bunsen raged.

"Wha-? This isn't what we worked so long for. We wanted to change the world!"

"This will change it."

"This will destroy it!"

I could feel my nails perforate their crescents into my skin as my fists tightened. I raised my gaze to a face I didn't recognise. A complexion so gelid, so hostile, so unfamiliar. His eyes held such a harsh stare lacking even a trace of the hope that used to reside there. The growl of the solution swelled further as I scavenged for any remnants of him. The man who shared my dorm. The man who pulled all-nighters with me before each exam. The man who promised we'd change the world together.

That is not the man who stared back.

"Things have changed. This is the only way."

Those words punctured my heart like a missile. Before he could retort anything further, I found myself lunging myself towards him. Hot wads of tears flurried down my cheeks as I attempted to tackle him but his superior frame overpowered. Rogue strands of hair migrated to his forehead, now ensealed with sweat as we struggled. His face homed a nasty snarl, and a musk of nicotine wafted onto my cheek.

His steepled shoes slipped along the glossed floor in his strife providing my opening. Extending my forearm, I constrained him to the table, enmeshing him between the precariously balanced beakers. His pants were barely audible beneath the ravaging rumble of the effervescing solution. As I suppressed him to the table, all I could focus on was his glazed eyes, now softened.

My grasp loosened around the plush linen puckered between my fingers.

His hand lurched around my neck and piled me face first into the wood, its abrasive complexion raking my cheek. The glasses chimed and bellowed as he jolted my head between his grip, pressing so hard all I could inhale was the piney incense of the work bench. I couldn't revolve my eyes to check but I knew that gentle expression was gone again, for good this time. It was all just a façade.

My heart began to crumble.

His hand clenched harder around my temple till a howl eventually escaped my lips. My arms flailed as I foraged for any semblance of aid in my vicinity. Glacial spatulas and coarse powders bore my touch till my hand recoiled from the sweltering skin of the guzzling beaker.

I heaved one last solemn breath before clenching the torrid glass and propelling it towards his head.

A shatter of glass and hiss of skin later, and...

"What have you done?!"

My head could finally bobble free as he plummeted to the floor. Regaining my balance, I leered back at the man now cradled like a wounded fawn. His hands wavered an inch from his face, only the right verge of his jaw recognisable beneath the stew of straggled skin flaying at the seams. A charred scent filled the air concealing his cologne. His wriggles persisted a few moments longer, until they didn't. All that was left was a husk of the man who wanted to change the world. No matter the cost.

The human experience is often steeped in mundanity, as we constantly encounter monotonous, humdrum jobs and tedious tasks on the everyday treadmill. That is why I personally believe the occasional spatter of wonder and excitement is exponentially more magical. My dad always told me, through his cynical outlook, that I see the world through a mystical lens or “rose-tinted glasses”, as I always find beauty and joy in the prosaic parts of life. Yet simply, I have always fought to keep a whimsical, mystical mindset, through surrounding myself with bounteous sources of joy and exhilaration. I illuminate my life with things that never fail to fill me with elation and endless awe, almost injecting vibrancy into the otherwise repetitive daily routines. Allow me to gush over the things that bring true wonder into my life as I reflect on my boring but occasionally tantalising teenage years.

As a girl whose headphones became a mere extension of her body, my first source of merriment is something that undoubtedly brings wonder and excitement into my life. I have always been fascinated and enamoured by music, the strong pulsating bass lines, the almost deafening dynamics and the artistic grandeur delineated by each enchanting chord progression. Music has been indisputably omnipresent and primal within my life, as my music loving mother made it her life's mission to fill our home with enriching melodies, to which she embarrassingly attempted to sing along to. (We quickly discovered she was unquestionably tone deaf). Despite my mum's utter lack of musical prowess, the numerous noise complaints from exasperated neighbours, countless croaked cadences and a few ostentatious dance moves, she managed to instil in my siblings and I, a deep passion for the wonderful, electrifying beauty that lies beneath the stave. Every moment I spend listening to music is a moment of wonder for me. As I hit shuffle on my meticulously, carefully crafted playlist of “The Best of Taylor Swift”, equipped with my swanky, clunky, white headphones, the charming melodies almost act as a forcefield from the outside world, like a bubble of bliss and beautiful beats. Music possesses the outstanding and unmatched power to evoke emotions from within its listeners. Sometimes, this includes beguiling melancholy thoughts, while blasting “Scott Street by Phoebe Bridgers, and other times dragging out glorious moments of glee. As I wholeheartedly perform a no budget world tour to a stadium of steadfast, adoring fans (My extensive collection of stuffed animals) Music is the most significant source of wonder and excitement in my life, that never fails to bring a smile to my face.

As I divulge my next musing, I urge you to keep an open mind. Usually, this particular source of exhilaration is met with deploring, disconcerting laughter, a sneer, coupled with a condescending comment accusing me of having “no substance”. Despite the disapproval, wrapping myself up in my pink, tattered, scruffy weighted blanket and indulging myself in a well-earned screening of season 10 of “Keeping up with the Kardashians” truly adds unmatched excitement and wonder into my days. Before you scoff, like many of my educated elders who I've confided in about my secret guilty pleasure, imagine a jam-packed hour of merciless, pitiless retorts surrounding last weeks frivolous fights, elegant yet questionable fashion choices, and physical brawls armed with the ultimate weapon, their mouths and a vintage chanel bag. Reality TV or as it is more commonly referred to by my grandmother as “trash TV” is a tantalising, immersive experience providing me with hours of excitement and fascination, as I am simply a bystander to fallacious friendships and their nemeses damnation. I engross myself in their wonderful world of decadence, opulence, melodramatic breakdowns and prestigious parties, as a form of escapism from the dull dreary Dublin life. Trust me when I say that their weekly family trip to the Bahamas on their ornate, priceless, private jet is a

lot more riveting than my family's trip to the local market. So why not throw myself into the life of incomprehensible prosperity for 60 minutes? Granted, through these superficial shows, I have learned many things about the ravages of materialism, yet my life wouldn't be half as enthralling without the endless endeavours of the Kardashian sisters. Watching their family gives me a weekly dose of wonder and adds vivid colour to life when it gets monochromatic.

As my aspiring career as a reality tv star has not yet taken off, I have had to explore other, more tangible, reasonable, career options, that makes me just as exuberant and brings equal amounts of gaiety into my life. As a child I have always dreamed of being a writer. I was continuously spellbound by the endless possibilities that were lying between the bindings of books. The written world enabled me to become an ambitious astronaut delving into the curious cosmos, or a daring detective deciphering complex clues at a visceral crime scene, seeking the callous condemnation of a cold-blooded criminal. My personal favourite was diving into the scenes of an astonishing archaeologist analysing ancient artefacts of great antiquity. Books open portals, transcending me to new dimensions loaded with curiosity and extraordinary excitement. Moving me with each evocative passage that I can never believe were cooked up and created in a wacky writers bright, brilliant brain. While unwinding, submerged under my glowing bed side lamp, marvelling at the wonder and excitement a book can bring, I had the epiphany that I should become one of these wacky writers myself. The sound of pages turning, the feeling of an unbroken book spine, and stimulating story lines will always bring exceptional admiration into my life.

I have always had bounteous enthusiastic ambitions and aspirations, as you could probably guess, and I have always felt at home surrounded by the steady, strong, syncopated beats of tap shoes on smooth vinyl floors, and exquisite, elegant, ethereal ballerinas springing and leaping from every corner. It is only within the salmon walls of my dance studio, laced with ballet bars perched on foggy studio mirrors, my stubborn shoulders leave their permanent position of residing beside my ears. Every time I dance it brings immense excitement and wonder. Manipulating and moulding my now malleable muscles into intricate shapes and creating artistic grandeur by shoving my leg above my head brings endless joy into my life. The pure glee I experience while I dance is otherworldly. It's like nothing else truly matters as I fling myself to the floor with pristine pointed feet or do twelve twirls while simultaneously clamouring and clashing myself into the cracked paint on the studio walls, which honestly happens a lot more often than I'd like to admit. Time stands still with the roaring, ear-splitting applause from amazed audiences after landing a flaring, flashy front flip. Dance has taught me life skills I couldn't have learned better anywhere else, as I was encouraged to persevere through each failed spin trick or flip and to value teamwork in every win loss or tie. Dance has irrevocably altered my identity, and I am eternally grateful for the unadulterated enjoyment that dance brings me.

These facets of life that always bring me infinite wonder have undoubtedly shaped and moulded my young mind and made me into the individual I am today, for better or for worse (hopefully not too much worse!) I am forever and always grateful my life is not overcome by mundanity, and I am occasionally graced with sprinkles of enchanting and charming moments, all thanks to music, reality tv, books and dance.

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Technology in schools

By Sarah Roberts

Firstly, I would like to start this week's article by welcoming everyone to a tantalizing, exhilarating, wonderful week filled with complex, stimulating science! Our world today has indisputably become engulfed by various forms of technology, as we transform and infiltrate into the digital age. After the overwhelming influx of comments and likes on last week's article surrounding the introduction of I pads into our classrooms here at The Dublin Academy, I have been asked to contemplate and delve into the increasing role of technology in schools today. As we traverse through our school year with a new learning aid, we will truly test if technology is hindering or helping our students.

Undoubtedly, there are a myriad of positive ways technology can be utilized and excellently employed in schools and classrooms. I'm sure we can all agree, especially as a sixth-year student, the burdensome, hefty, heavy weight of our elephantine backpacks is ridiculous, as we are tasked with hauling bulky books on our broken backs for hours at a time. Recently, my backpack has been reminiscent of a gargantuan, mountainous boulder, as I waddle around the halls looking like a turtle. However, through the introduction of technology, we can shoulder the weight of hundreds and thousands of notes and textbooks by carrying around a singular iPad or weightless laptop, saving several students spines! Additionally, we wouldn't have to spend the majority of our short, precious class time, meaninglessly meandering through the long laborious lanes of the library searching and scavenging for data that would be available at the click of a button through the internet. In addition to the multitude of advantages of technology, how else would you read and subscribe to The Dublin Academy website and instagram page without technology!

Despite the gamut of positive ways technology can be integrated into classrooms, we cannot simply ignore the negative facets of these curious gadgets. The troubling increase in popularity of the callous murderer of creativity, Chat GPT, and other AI instruments clearly pose a threat to our learning. This hazardous, perilous part of technology being permitted in an environment of merciless, tiresome tests encourages exasperated students to cheat. This terrifying tool can, within seconds, craft the most thought provoking, breathtaking, gripping Shakespearean study a teacher has ever had the pleasure of reading. This scary source of information, that produces over 30% of students' classwork in 2024, fosters an environment of indolence and dependency on technology, creating students that are not properly prepared for the ravages of the real world and the challenges of their chosen career path. On top of this, having technology within students reach will inevitably lead to distractions, as students are beguiled by the infinite possibilities of the internet. Students may choose to focus their attention on mini games, or surfing the web for spellbinding, stunning outfits for their weekend plans, rather than their teacher's deep dissection of W.B Yeats' "The Lake Isle of Innisfree", or Pythagoras' theorem. To be completely honest, I even took a short break from typing out this article to scroll through TMZ's website for their latest celebrity condemnations.

As much as our educated elders would like to disagree, technology is our future. The endless possibilities of technology consistently inhabit and bounce around my brain. As much as I would love to predict that in the future, the classrooms here at The Dublin Academy will be populated by homework-eating robots, or metal, mechanical teachers that circle the classroom on wheels, I will try to be realistic. Of course we can expect that chalkboards morph into touch screens or smart boards, and books turn into merely words on a sparkling screen. Yet I hope we utilize this influential, swanky new tool to enhance our education, and to facilitate learning for those with disabilities. Technology can be used to create a learning environment where all students can fully engage and achieve their full academic potential. Although I love to indulge in outlandish theories such as a microchip implanted in our brains to retain all the many monotonous details surrounding the tedious topic of trigonometry, we truly never know where technology will bring us in the future.

This brings us to the question, is technology a help or a hindrance? There is no doubt that the increasing role played by technology will inevitably, irrevocably alter the education system that we know, and (some of us) love. We must simply embrace the intimidating change, and there are no better students other than us here at The Dublin Academy to integrate technology into our classrooms. Before I close up this week's article, I would like to remind students to click the link below to vote in our poll, to settle the grave, imperative, urgent, decision of whether the cafeteria will serve sausage rolls or waffles at Thursday's science fair! And as always, remember to log back in next week for more news here at The Dublin Academy!

www.TheDublinAcademyPolls/LunchforScienceFair

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